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THE JAPANESE PLAN OF UNION

Between Presbyterians and Congregationalists.

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There are the same reasons for Christian union in Japan as in this country, no more and no less that I know of. Here, with all the evils of denominationalism which we all deplore, no practicable plan for an organic union has ever been devised.

It has come to be considered a dream that never has been realized and never will be. It is a serious question whether it is even desirable; whether a fraternal spirit and cordial Christian coöperation which concedes the right of pre-occupancy is not the best that can be hoped for among the denominations.

The Plan before us is a proposed organic union between Congregationalists and various branches of Presbyterians. These branches are virtually one, and so the union is really of only two denominations in Japan, and yet it is proposed to call it, "The Church of Christ in Japan." This name partakes of an arrogance which we have not been slow to condemn in others. It must at once excite hostility in all other denominations.

And if this plan should be adopted how much would be effected?

How would Christianity then be presented to the Japanese?

1. The Roman Catholics will still claim to be the only true church.
2. The Episcopalians will still claim to be *the* church and call all others "sects."

3. The Baptists will still assert that immersion is the only door to the Christian church.

4. The Methodists will come forward with their newly appointed Missionary Bishops, and then will come,

5. "The church of Christ in Japan," and what in reality will be accomplished?

Why not cultivate brotherly love, and treat one another with Christian courtesy, and trust that the Japanese will have sense enough to allow for difference of views among honest men?

2. The Doctrinal basis of the proposed "Church of Japan," is objectionable. It presents for adoption

(1) The fictitious "Apostles' Creed," which the Apostles never saw, which is scarcely a creed at all; which is more remarkable for its omissions of the doctrines of Christianity than for their statement; which is the production of uninspired and unknown men in a crude age, after inspiration had ceased and before theology had become a science. I have not time to present this in full now; allow me to refer you to the *Advance* of Feb. 24, 1887, for a longer treatment of the subject, which has never to my knowledge been refuted, and I see not how it can be.

(2) The basis presents also the Nicene Creed for adoption, which zealously sought to supply the omissions of the Apostles' Creed, which intended to add the divinity of Christ and of the Holy Spirit, the Trinity, the Atonement, some allusions to the Scriptures, the perpetuity of Christ's kingdom, the inspiration of the prophets, the agency of the Son in creation, baptism and worship; but which still omits the Lord's Supper, the Rule of Faith, the general inspiration of the Scriptures, the Fall of Man, need of Regeneration, Moral Agency, conditions of Salvation, Repentance, Faith, and holy living, the work of the Spirit in and for men, the Perseverance of the Saints, and Future Retribution.

Worse than these omissions are its strange statements about the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Son "begotten" before all worlds, as though antedating the worlds, would escape the idea of a derived being inferior to the Father! I think it was Moses Stuart who pronounced eternal gen-

eration, "eternal nonsense," and if any living man can tell me the meaning of those other phrases, "God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made," and harmonize them with the eternity of the Second Person, and His equality with the Father, I shall be happy to listen and learn. If these phrases referred to His incarnation, they might convey some idea; but of course they do not, for that is treated of separately.

So, with the Spirit; Scriptural teachings of His being sent by the Father on His ministries to men, are misinterpreted as meaning a metaphysical or ontological "procession from the Father and the Son." Why should such puzzling statements be imposed on the Japanese convert? The omission of both these defective and obsolete creeds, and the retention of that of the Evangelical Alliance, which it also presents for adoption, would be a great improvement. As that already has the assent of many denominations, it would answer such a purpose tolerably well.

### 3. As to the Polity.

This plan destroys the autonomy of the local church. I know the contrary has been asserted, but I cannot see it.

(1) To begin with, the autonomy of the local church implies its right to state its faith in its own language. This constitution imposes on it a creed from without, which it does not allow them even to "accept for substance of doctrine."

(2) The churches are expected to delegate "certain specified powers to Bukwai, Renkwai and Sokwai," three outside and higher bodies, and can themselves exercise such only as they have not delegated. "A church may, therefore, adopt such a form of internal organization as it shall deem advisable. In any case, however, provision shall be made for the representation of the church in Bukwai and Renkwai." (Chapter 5, page 7.)

(3) Believers are not allowed to organize themselves into a church, but must apply to a Bukwai, who shall organize one if they think expedient (p. 15).

(4) When a church desires to call a bishop, it is expected to invite a bishop of Bukwai to be its chairman

(p. 69), in words with which we are familiar, "to moderate a call."

(5) The church is not allowed to discipline all its own members. Its bishop or other ministers may become members of the church, but are not amenable to its discipline. Chap. 9, Sec. 11. "Bishops, whether members of churches or not, are subject to the discipline of the Bukwai to which they belong." p. 23. The Bukwai alone can discipline them. They are thus a privileged order—above common members in violation of the Savior's law (Matt. 23: 8) "One is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren." On this Plan the church can have the honor of the membership of these ministers when it is an honor, but cannot rid itself of the dishonor when it is a dishonor, provided the unworthy bishop has influence enough among his fellow bishops in the Bukwai to secure a majority of their votes. Then the church is helpless under the power of an oligarchy.

And further, the disciplinable offences of these aristocratic members of the church are differently defined from those of the common class. "In the case of a bishop an offence is something clearly forbidden in the Scriptures, or contrary to the Constitution of the church of Christ in Japan; in the case of any other, an offence is something clearly forbidden in the Scriptures or contrary to the rules of the church of which he is a member." So it would seem that this higher class church member might violate the rules of the church and not commit a disciplinable offence. No church with any degree of self-respect would admit any such members.

(6) Any one or more members dissatisfied with the decision of a church may appeal to Bukwai, which may decide it finally, or may refer it to a committee of Renkwai, whose decision shall be final; or Renkwai may refer it to the committee of Sokwai, whose decision shall be "final." Nowhere is the finding merely "advisory," as church autonomy requires.

These provisions of the Plan demonstrate that the self-government of the local church is not respected.

They demonstrate further that what has been sometimes called the nuisance of Appeals from one judicatory up to another in the Presbyterian church of this country, is not avoided in this Plan. See also Chap. 10, Sec. 1. "Appeals originating in a church are decided by the Bukwai," "those originating in a Bukwai are decided by the Renkwai," "those originating in a Renkwai are decided by the Sokwai."

These provisions demonstrate further that the fellowship of these churches is not fellowship, but subjection to these bodies in regular grade above them; *viz.*: Bukwai, Renkwai and Sokwai; alias Presbytery, Synod and General Assembly.

Now after thus taking away both the autonomy and the fellowship of our churches, is it not a little cool to say (see *Advance* of August 23) "It is of course possible that in twenty years all these churches may have government by elders, but also that the present sessions may all be reduced to standing committees, and in either case the churches will only be using their freedom"? (Mr. Learned's letter indorsed by Secretary Clark.)

It betrays great want of discernment to speak of these alternatives as equally probable; and to leave Congregationalism at such disadvantage, and then throw over upon the freedom of their will all possible consequences, was scarcely to be expected from a Congregational leader in the negotiation.

See also how skillfully this Plan is devised to secure the perpetual loyalty of the ministers:

Their ministerial standing depends on membership in Bukwai. Anything "contrary to the Constitution of the church of Christ in Japan," is a disciplinable offence in a minister. Now a minister might become convinced that this Constitution is unscriptural and wrong, and might desire to start a genuine Congregational church. But if he should attempt it he would commit a disciplinable offence, and would need the spirit of the old anti-slavery martyrs to dare it.

The Plan also similarly fetters deacons of the Congregational churches. At their election "they shall sig-

nify their acceptance of the Constitution of the church of Japan," p. 53.

Nor the deacons only; when a representative is chosen to Bukwai, he is made to swear allegiance to this church of Christ in Japan before he can represent his church in Bukwai, p. 36, 4.

Was ever Plan more shrewdly devised to perpetuate its own power?

This is worse than the Old Plan of Union in 1801. That never required a delegate from a Congregational church to swear fealty to the Plan of Union.

Another queer thing in this plan — the majority rule is discarded in Bukwai and Renkwai; on an appeal from a church one-third of Bukwai can refuse to try it and pass it on to a committee of Renkwai. And so one-third of the voters of Renkwai can refuse to consider a case, and pass it over to a committee of Sokwai.

Where did this government by minorities come from? Presbyterianism or Buddhism, or what?

The savor and atmosphere of this Plan are almost entirely Presbyterian. It starts with saying, "The New Testament enjoins no one particular form of church government" (p. 7), a statement which certainly is modified by the eighteenth and twenty-third of Matthew, by the Epistles to the Corinthians and by primitive examples.

Then as we go on through the pamphlet we have nearly all the details of Presbyterianism translated into Japanese. We have the one "church" of Japan instead of "the churches." We have Presbytery, Synod and General Assembly, under the names Bukwai, Renkwai and Sokwai. We have, as already said, the System of Appeals. We have "final decisions" for the churches rather than "advice" to them. And worse still, decisions by committees which the churches have no voice in electing, pp. 21, 22. We have control of the lower bodies by the higher. "Renkwai shall examine records of Bukwai," p. 19, 3. "Sokwai shall uphold truth and righteousness throughout the Renkwai, the Bukwai and the Churches," p. 21. How much might this be made to cover in an emergency!



Renkwai may establish Boards of Home Missions, establish or assume connection with Christian Schools, Colleges, and Theological Seminaries." pp. 18 and 19. "Sokwai may establish a Board of Foreign Missions." p. 21, 1.

In short, if there is one element or principle of Presbyterianism which is not incorporated in this Plan, I have overlooked it; and if there is one element or principle of Congregationalism that is fairly and consistently preserved in this Plan, I have failed to find it.

There needs no prophet to tell the result of its adoption. There needs no reasoning from history, no experimental trial even. It is already full-fledged Presbyterianism.

It is scarcely credible that this Plan should have originated with the Japanese themselves, without suggestion from extraneous sources. There is too much adroitness in it to have sprung from unsophisticated young converts.

If we have any regard for Congregationalism in our missions, we should call a halt, should ask a postponement of final action for at least one year, to give time for a little discussion, before we consent to turn over to the Presbyterians all the Congregational churches of Japan. Nay, if we have any regard for true Christian unity in Japan, we should protest against this Plan. Some of the Japanese will certainly learn that it is oppressive, and will demand a free church. Then there will be conflict and greater disunion.

And doubtless some rigid Presbyterians will complain of any affiliation with Congregational churches, and will secede, and so the result will be three denominations instead of two. These results would be simply history repeating itself.



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